

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1363

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 11247

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VT, XF

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION ON MIDDLE EAST WITH VATICAN OFFICIAL

REF: ROME 10932

1. DURING CALL ON VATICAN DESK OFFICER FOR MIDDLE EAST OCT. 16 WE PRESENTED COPIES OF PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AND DEPARTMENT PRESS CONFERENCE OF PREVIOUS DAY, POINTING OUT SALIENT FEATURES OF BOTH. DESK OFFICER SAID THAT LATEST WAR CAUGHT VATICAN AT BAD TIME WITH ALL OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES IN MIDDLE EAST AWAY FROM POST. NEVERTHELESS, NUNCIATURES HAVE BEEN REPORTING ON LOCAL CONDITIONS AND WELFARE OF CATHOLIC PERSONNEL IN COUNTRIES CONCERNED. NUNCIATURE AT DAMASCUS HAS SUPPLIED DETAILED REPORT OF MASSIVE DAMAGE CAUSED BY ISRAELI BOMBINGS. IN RESPONSE TO OUR QUERY, SOURCE SAID THIS REPORT MADE NO MENTION OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY.

2. SOURCE SAID THAT, BEYOND POPE'S PERIODIC PLEAS FOR IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES, VATICAN HAD NO PLANS TO BECOME INVOLVED. SOURCE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHAT COULD CHURCH DO BEYOND ENCOURAGING PEACE.

3. IN RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ARAB EMBASSIES OR SOVIETS HAD BEEN IN CONTACT WITH VATICAN ON MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, CONFIDENTIAL
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SOURCE SAID HE DOUBTED THAT MANY HAD CALLED ON ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI, BUT IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT ARAB AMBASSADORS WERE SEEING ARCHBISHOP

BENELLI, THE "DEPUTY" SECRETARY OF STATE. IN ABSENCE OF SOVIET AMBASSADOR RYZHOV, SOVIET DCM HAD CALLED ON CASAROLI LAST WEEK, SOURCE SAID, BUT HE WAS SURE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION NOT SUBJECT OF CALL. DESK OFFICER EXPRESSED HOPE THAT US DECISION TO RESUME SHIPMENT OF MILITARY SUPPLIES TO ISRAEL DID NOT INDICATE THAT OUR DIALOGUE WITH SOVIET UNION RE A SEARCH FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE HAD ENDED. WE ASSURED HIM THAT OUR CONTACTS WITH THE SOVIETS WERE CONTINUING.

4. SOURCE INFORMED US THAT ANTICIPATED PAPAL AUDIENCE FOR EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ZAYYAT HAD BEEN SHELVED FOR TIME BEING. EGYPTIAN AND VATICAN AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH AND DECIDED THAT DUE TO ZAYYAT'S HEAVY SCHEDULE IT WOULD NOT BE FEASIBLE FOR HIM TO VISIT ROME AT THIS TIME. SOURCE ALSO SAID THAT ISRAELI EMBASSY HAS NOT BEEN IN TOUCH WITH VATICAN, NOR HAS THERE BEEN TALK OF A POSSIBLE VATICAN VISIT BY FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN. VOLPE

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